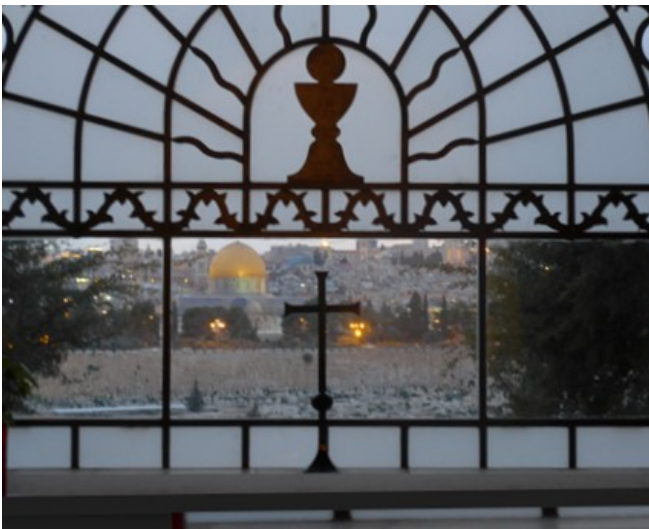




THE WORD FOR TODAY

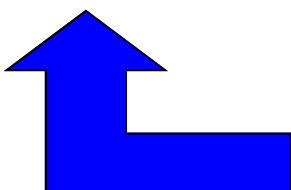
Matthew's Gospel, Chapter 20, vv 20-28 ***A request for special treatment***



This is near the end of Jesus' ministry, just before he makes his last fateful journey to Jerusalem. Foreboding is in the air, and the disciples are thinking ahead. Not long ago they had asked Jesus who would be the greatest in the Kingdom, and he had told them to humble themselves as children. Later he had said that they would have 12 thrones in the Kingdom as his specially chosen 12 disciples, but this extract is about precedence—who would have the best seats!

The mother of James and John was related to Mary, the mother of Jesus, and they, along with Peter, were part of the inner circle around Jesus. In Mark's version of the story the two disciples ask the question, but here it is their mother, although they are there with her. They were all clearly of one mind—we can't say it was just a mother being ambitious for her sons.

Follow the words of this passage round the church, beginning on the north wall of this little building. We are using the New International Version of the Bible, which you can find on the internet under Bible Gateway, and the whole "Word for Today" is on the church website, which is www.libertonkirk.net You can also find meditations and prayers on other Bible passages there in previous "Words for Today".



Turn immediately left to find the first verses of the Bible passage on the bench

“Then the mother of Zebedee’s sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favour of him.

1

‘What is it you want?’ he asked.

She said ‘Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom.’”

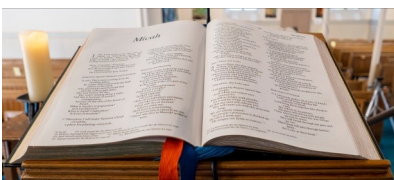


Ambition is important—many brilliant life-changing discoveries and achievements would not have been made without it. If it is greedy or selfish or if it hurts others then clearly it is not so good. Having already been promised thrones in the Kingdom along with the other ten disciples, this request really fell into the “not so good” category.

Their attitude does speak to us, however, of their constancy. These disciples and their mother were treating Jesus with the humility he fully deserved—and were holding on to their faith in the coming kingdom. Many might have deemed Jesus a lost cause as Jerusalem approached.

*Lord, may I always come humbly before you when I pray.
Help me not to pray selfishly
or seek status for its own sake.*

(No. 2 is on the bench just round the corner of the church building you are looking at)



THE WORD FOR TODAY

*“You don’t know what you are asking,’
Jesus said to them.
‘Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?’
‘We can’, they answered. ”*

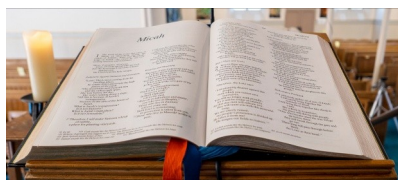
2

Jesus was so patient and so kind—are we always as gentle with people who are being a bit of a nuisance or should know better? He was also being honest with them—did they realise what they might have to suffer as his followers and “right-hand” men? They rose to the challenge. They were willing to follow him to the end. That takes courage—and faith that it will be worthwhile.



*Lord, thank you for your patience and kindness.
Help me to accept that following you is not an easy option
and to have the courage to work for your kingdom
of love, justice and peace in our world.*

(No. 3 is further along this side of the church building)



THE WORD FOR TODAY

“ Jesus said to them, ‘You will indeed drink from my cup, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared by my Father.’”

3



Throughout his life Jesus knew that he was on earth to do his Father’s will—at the age of 12, when he was found in the Temple in Jerusalem, he said he was doing his Father’s business, as though this was completely to be expected. Even just before his crucifixion, when he prayed that he might not have to go through with it, he wanted God’s will to be done above all else.

We believe as Christians that we are here to love God and to love our neighbour. We know that we can’t influence how God treats us by our actions—he will always be ready to forgive our sins and will always love us, and for that we are so grateful.

***Lord, loving heavenly Father, thank you for your Son Jesus.
I want above all to follow him and to do your will,
not seeking any reward but in gratitude for your love and goodness.***

(Walk along the back of the church and turn right to find No. 4 on the prayer bench)



THE WORD FOR TODAY

*“When the ten heard about this,
they were indignant with the two brothers.”*

4

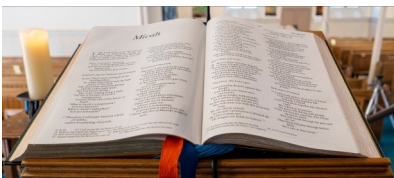
It's hardly surprising that the rest of the disciples were cross about James and John seeking special treatment. The brothers were going behind their backs, stealing a march if you like.

Jesus, of course, knew what they were feeling, just as he knows our feelings and thoughts. It's a bit scary to realise that it's no good apparently being nice but thinking awful thoughts as you do so. God knows what we're thinking—there's nothing hidden from him. He can read us like a book and it's up to us to ensure those thoughts can bear scrutiny.



*Lord, still all my thoughts of envy.
Let my thoughts not wander to selfish ideas.
Help me to concentrate on the needs of others and what I can do.*

(No. 5 is on the West side of the church before you come to the tower)



THE WORD FOR TODAY

***“Jesus called them together and said,
‘You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord
it over them, and their high officials exercise
authority over them.
Not so with you.’”***

5

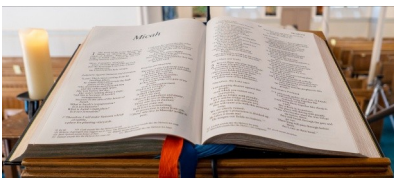


Jesus had a good opportunity to make an important point: if you want to follow me you have to have different values from the world. You should be seen to be different from the status-seekers who want to be seen to be important.

It’s a good message for all of us in a world obsessed with status and celebrity—where there is much corruption at the top of governments and where inequalities in society widen all the time.

***Lord, it’s not easy to be different, to go against the norm.
Help me to think before I say or do
and ask “What would Jesus do?”
Then give me the courage to do the same, I pray.***

(Walk towards the front of the church and find No. 6 near the cairn)



THE WORD FOR TODAY

“Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave”

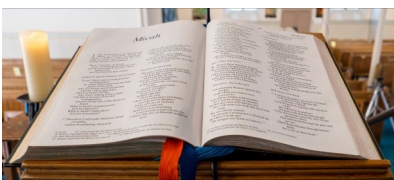
6

Sitting beside the Covid Memorial is a good place to think of some of the heroes of the awful months after the start of the pandemic: the NHS staff, the Care Home workers, the neighbours doing the shopping, the people providing meals and care to the housebound. All people serving others in ordinary (or extraordinary) ways and sometimes doing menial tasks for the helpless, which might well have been a slave’s job in Jesus’ day. People who took risks and made sacrifices to help others—they were the ones who deserved the thanks and praise. It’s something we need to remember now that life has returned to “normal”.



***Lord, thank you for people who gave their all in the Covid pandemic.
Help me to serve others and not myself.
Let me not shirk the difficult or menial tasks.
Give me love and kindness to all I meet.***

(Walk to the front of the church and find No. 7 on one of the benches)



THE WORD FOR TODAY

“... just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

7

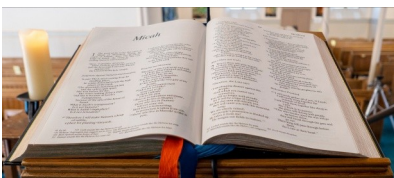
What an example we have before us in Jesus! Throughout his whole life he was seeking to serve those who needed help and to give them the opportunity to know God's love for themselves. Sometimes this was through his miracles such as healing or feeding the hungry. Sometimes it was through his teaching. Today, 2000 years later, we can find out about God's love ourselves through knowing Jesus.

Finally he gave up his life on the cross so that we could be saved from our sins and brought back to God. He paid the price for us. Such love and grace!



***Lord, how can I thank you for Jesus' life and teaching?
How can I thank you for his death and rising again to save me?
Only by living my life as close to his ways as I can with your help.***

If anything you have read has prompted questions you would like to discuss, please contact John Young on 664 3067 or jyoung@churchofscotland.org.uk



THE WORD FOR TODAY

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